

Statement of Joe Holsinger  
to Forum entitled:

"PSYCHO-SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS  
OF THE JONESTOWN PHENOMENON"

Miyako Hotel, San Francisco

May 23, 1980

1:30pm to 4:00pm

I appreciate your invitation to participate in today's Forum on the "Psycho-Social Implications of the Jonestown Phenomenon." As the Administrative Assistant to Congressman Leo Ryan, I participated in the investigation of charges against Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple from November 1977 until Mr. Ryans' trip to Guyana in November 1978.

That investigation made us aware of the seriousness of the allegations by members of the Concerned Relatives and by Deborah Layton Blakey, an important Jones aide who fled Guyana in May, 1978. But Leo and I never anticipated the irrational violence that occurred at Port Kaituma and Jonestown.

The phrase "irrational violence" is used in the context of the now-accepted mythology of Jonestown which includes phrases such as "suicide cult", "mass suicide", "charismatic leader", "jungle horror" and "escape by death." As of today, some 18 months and 5 days after the event, I am prepared to question that mythology. My supporting data, with 15 copies of three separate documents to leave with you, include the following:

1. My statement of February 20, 1980 to the International Operations Subcommittee of the House of Representatives International Relations Committee.
2. Letter to me dated March 28, 1980 from John Spagnola, Legislative Director of APRL, the Alliance for the Pres-

ervation of Religious Liberty, with their report of March 31, 1980 entitled "Unanswered Questions Involving Jonestown and the CIA."

3. Article entitled "The Penal Colony" sent to me on March 6, 1980 by a Berkeley psychologist who has asked that his name be withheld. This article was written in January, 1979, less than two months after the Jonestown tragedy.

Going back to November, 1978 I accepted most of the news stories from Guyana as factual, at the time of their occurrence. I was bitter about some State Department stories which I know to be false, but attributed them to incompetence or bureaucratic cover-up.

In my naivete, I remained silent about a phone call I received from the White House a few hours after the murders at the Port Kaituma airstrip. The caller asked me for the names of the news media men who had been killed. In response to my question on the accuracy of the report, the caller said "Joe, we have a CIA report from the scene." I assumed at that time that we had an intelligence gathering operation in Guyana, but not a covert operation. And I remained mute about the CIA presence at the airstrip.

One year later, in December 1979, I began to realize that our government had constructed and passed along a carefully fabricated version of Jonestown to the news media. That version has come to be accepted as "fact" by the American people.

The December 1979 catalyst for me was a front page story in the San Mateo Times "CIA Agent Witnessed Jonestown Mass Suicide." That story tabbed Richard Dwyer, our Deputy Chief of Mission in Guyana, as a CIA agent, and claimed that he had gone back into Jonestown after Leo's murder. Tape recordings made while 900 Americans were dying contain Jim Jones' shouted words, over and over, "get Dwyer out of here." The news story also raises a question as to who shot Jim Jones and why.

The significance of Dwyer's CIA role and his return to Jonestown after the shooting at Port Kaituma is that it proved the existence of a covert CIA operation in Guyana that had not been reported to the appropriate oversight Committees of Congress as required by the Hughes-Ryan Act of 1974. It also raised the likelihood that the co-author of that Act, Leo Ryan, had been led into, or allowed to fall into, a death trap.

My statement of February 20th in Washington detailed my belief that the CIA was in effective control of our State Department Embassy in Guyana, and that it conducted a covert operation there designed to protect our commercial interests and to maintain the government of Prime Minister Forbes Burnham in power. The CIA links to Jim Jones appeared to me to be part of that design.

Upon my return from Washington, I began to receive communications containing new information on Jonestown, information that suggested a horrifying possibility as to the true nature of the Jonestown Phenomenon, as you call it here today.

That possibility is that Jonestown was a mass mind control experiment by the CIA as part of its MK ULTRA program. MK ULTRA was organized by the CIA in 1953 to search for control of the human mind, not only of individuals but of groups and whole populations. You may recall its LSD experiments. MK ULTRA programs were conducted in VA and state hospitals and in federal and state penitentiaries under the guise of "rehabilitation." Organized pressure and legal action by civil liberties groups finally forced then-CIA Director Richard Helms to tell a Senate Committee in 1974 that MK ULTRA was terminated and that the CIA had lost interest in mind control.

The Berkeley author of the article "The Penal Colony" believes that rather than terminating MK ULTRA, the CIA shifted its programs from public institutions to private cult groups, including the Peoples' Temple. That same theory was arrived at independently in Washington, D.C. by APRL, the Alliance for the Preservation of Religious Liberty. Their report discussed the massive quantities of mind control drugs found at Jonestown. It mentions the daily medical check-ups for

everyone. It also documents some very important points:

1. Attachment #3 details Richard Dwyer's status as a CIA agent since 1959; Dwyer came to Guyana from Thailand in May 1978.
2. Attachment #6 gives the Chicago Defender as the source for information that a top Jones aide, George Phillip Blakey, served as a mercenary and mercenary-recruiter for the CIA-backed UNITA forces in Angola in 1975. Blakey, a British citizen, is the same man who arranged the lease and the money for the lease of the Jonestown settlement area with the government of Guyana in 1974.

Blakey is the husband of Deborah Layton Blakey who fled Guyana in May 1978 after Dwyer arrived; he is the brother-in-law of Larry Layton, who has been charged with complicity in the murders at Port Kaituma and is currently on trial in Guyana for the attempted murder of Vernon Gosney.

Blakey is the son-in-law of Dr. Lawrence Layton, former Chief of Biochemistry and Director of Chemical Warfare at the U.S. Army Dugway Proving Ground in Utah in the early 1950's; more recently, Dr. Layton has worked as a research scientist at the Western Regional Research Laboratory for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Berkeley, California.

3. Point #9 on pages 10 and 11 quotes the chief medical examiner in Guyana, Dr. Leslie Mootoo as reporting that more than 700 of those whose bodies were found at Jonestown were not suicide victims, but were murdered.

That last point is of special importance to me. My acquaintanceship with black families and my sense of the love that flows from black parents to their children make it impossible for me to believe that the Jonestown mass-suicides could have happened as reported.

Instead, I believe that it is possible that Jonestown may have been a mind control experiment, that Leo Ryan's Congressional visit pierced that veil and would have resulted in its exposure, and that our government, or its agent the CIA, deemed it necessary to wipe out over 900 American citizens to protect the secrecy of the operation.

I am also troubled by the general public impression left over from Jonestown, which is that of a large group of disturbed and foolish black people who turned their backs on this country and then killed themselves --- so good riddance. Something is very wrong with that racist impression. For one thing, we know that most of the Peoples Temple leadership was white.

I am here today for two reasons. The first is to provide you with available data and to share my experiences with you. The second is to suggest to you that, as black scholars from across the country, you are uniquely qualified to research the possibility that the truth about Jonestown has not yet been determined. You may be able to contact members of the black community who were involved with the Peoples Temple personally or through relatives, and who do not realize that they can contribute information that may help to solve its riddle.

In conclusion, I would like to quote a passage from Mark Lanes' book "The Strongest Poison." I despise Lane, and know personally that at least some of the statements in his book are not true. But this one paragraph at the conclusion of Chapter 5 on Jim Jones seemed odd on first reading, and has kept coming back to me. It reads:

"One of his closest aides, who survived the end of the Peoples Temple, said "When under the influence of drugs in Jonestown, he (Jones) claimed that he was a true, loyal and patriotic American and that it was a terrible shame that he was obligated to remain in Guyana. He said people would never know what a true patriot he was. He said that socialism could never work; that man is not perfectable. He read and quoted from two books

which asserted that socialism could not work. Those books were his Bible."

In my personal search for the truth about the murder of my best friend, Leo Ryan, I have found it to be very difficult to determine the dividing line between legitimate suspicion and paranoia. It would be much easier, and certainly more socially acceptable, to end my efforts. But each time that I falter in my resolve, something happens to get me going again. This time, it was your invitation to be here today. I hope that my statement will prove to be of some value to you. Thank you.